

are the gold standard in preserving the final resting place of this Nation's heroes.

I've had the privilege of visiting our cemeteries in Normandy, in Luxembourg and Cyrennes which is just outside Paris. I believe that those who work at these cemeteries, in fact, when I said they set the gold standard, it is a standard to which our VA cemeteries here in this country should achieve. It's emblematic, I believe, of our Nation's regard to those who made the highest sacrifice.

They are true shrines to Americans who came to lands that they had never seen, to fight for a people that they had never met. They fought for no bounty of their own and left freedom in their footsteps.

Normandy, the American cemetery, is probably the most famous of our Nation's overseas cemeteries. It is the final resting place of more than 10,000 Americans who died in one of the greatest and most decisive battles of the epic struggle against tyranny in World War II. This year the Commission will open a new visitors center to help communicate the story of this site to those who fought and died over its length and breadth in time.

I had the opportunity to deliver the Memorial Day address, along with my friend HENRY BROWN of South Carolina, at Normandy as I stood there on the cliffs at Omaha Beach in 2005, an experience that I will never forget.

When I visited the Luxembourg cemetery last year, I was in awe of the beauty of the white stone chapel flanked by two very large stone pylons as the centerpiece of this cemetery in which then-General Patton lies in rest before his men. These pylons have maps and inscriptions telling the achievements of the U.S. Armed Forces in the region. Inscribed here are the 371 names of missing who gave their lives near this site but whose remains were not recovered or identified.

The Luxembourg cemetery is also the final resting place for some 5,000 GIs who repulsed Hitler's final offensive in the Battle of the Bulge, including several members of the famous Band of Brothers, deposited in Steve Ambrose's book.

I think if you visited any of these cemeteries all over the world you can't help but walk away with the same feeling that I have, a strong sense of humility and very humbled that these individuals gave everything in the name of freedom and in the name of liberty.

I just encourage everyone so when you go overseas and you're on a trip, or you go to Paris, pause for a moment and go visit one of our cemeteries on foreign land.

And I'm pleased that after World War II we now make every effort to bring these bodies back to our own country. So from Korea and Vietnam and the first Gulf War, second Gulf War, we try everything we can to bring these bodies back.

And speaking of Korea, now that the chairman is here on the floor, I would

even ask of the chairman, there is a bill that was filed by one of our colleagues to bring recognition to Raymond Jerry Murphy, to name the Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center in New Mexico after this Medal of Honor winner. And I've given you several letters as to why this bill shouldn't be brought up. We're hopeful that you could have brought this bill to the floor while he was alive, but now he has since deceased.

So I would ask the chairman if he has knowledge as to why this bill shouldn't be brought to the floor and given the same honor to which you're giving here with regard to this bill.

I yield to the chairman.

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, this is not a germane issue, and I will stick to dealing with the bills on the floor.

Mr. BUYER. So the chairman would raise an issue of germaneness rather than addressing the issue of how we honor the men and women who serve this country. That is disappointing.

This is a Medal of Honor winner from the Korean War in which we tried to seek to give recognition, just like we're doing in this bill, in how we honor our Nation's sacred fallen. This is an individual of whom is so respected in New Mexico the entire delegation supports it. It passed by unanimous consent in the Senate. The Senate bill lies upon this desk, but the chairman of the Veterans Affairs Committee won't bring it to the floor, and I don't understand.

I will now yield back to the gentleman for a better explanation, rather than germaneness, as to why you will not honor this veteran that the entire delegation of New Mexico supports.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. ROSS). Does the gentleman from Indiana yield back the balance of his time?

Mr. BUYER. No, the gentleman from Indiana yields to the chairman of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee.

PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, parliamentary inquiry.

Does the yeldee have to make time for an extraneous comment from the yielder?

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Does the gentleman from Indiana yield for a parliamentary inquiry?

Mr. BUYER. I absolutely yield for a parliamentary inquiry.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The gentleman from California will state his parliamentary inquiry.

Mr. FILNER. Is the yeldee required to give time to the yielder for a matter that has nothing to do with the matter under discussion?

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Members may yield to one another during debate, but remarks must be confined to the question under debate.

Mr. FILNER. So are they through with their time? Have they yielded back the balance of their time?

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The gentleman from Indiana has the floor.

Mr. BUYER. I will reclaim my time since the gentleman now is not speaking of a parliamentary inquiry.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The gentleman from Indiana is recognized.

Mr. BUYER. Mr. Speaker, I think by silence, by omission, the chairman just spoke, and how disappointed I am that veterans, that he just said that he wanted to come to the floor, that he was going to take this moment as a thank-you to veterans and all they do; yet here we have an opportunity in bipartisanship to recognize this Medal of Honor winner from Korea, whereby he wouldn't even do it when the gentleman was alive, and now he's deceased, and he still won't even give this individual the recognition. Yet the Senate bill, in a bipartisan fashion, lays upon this desk.

I am very disappointed, and I don't know what it's going to take to get you to move this bill and give the recognition. The Governor supports it. The two Senators support it. The Members of Congress from New Mexico support it. All the veterans service organizations support the bill, and I support this bill.

And if you know of a particular reason as to why this Medal of Honor winner, Mr. Murphy, should not receive this recognition by having the veterans hospital named in his honor, please let all of us know, because if you're blocking this for political motive, now we're upset.

Mr. LAMBORN. Mr. Speaker, on behalf of H. Res. 392, I have nothing more to add except I do want to thank the chairman and I want to thank the ranking member for their words on behalf of H. Res. 392, and I urge its adoption by the entire House. I yield back the balance of my time.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on H. Res. 392.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from California?

There was no objection.

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to join Mr. LAMBORN and me to unanimously support H. Res. 392. I have no further requests for time, and I yield back my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from California (Mr. FILNER) that the House suspend the rules and agree to the resolution, H. Res. 392.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the resolution was agreed to.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

VETERANS OUTREACH IMPROVEMENT ACT OF 2007

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 67) to amend title 38, United

States Code, to improve the outreach activities of the Department of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 67

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the “Veterans Outreach Improvement Act of 2007”.

SEC. 2. IMPROVEMENT OF OUTREACH ACTIVITIES WITHIN DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Chapter 5 of title 38, United States Code, is amended by adding at the end the following new subchapter:

“SUBCHAPTER IV—OUTREACH ACTIVITIES

“§ 561. Outreach activities: coordination of activities within the Department

“(a) COORDINATION PROCEDURES.—The Secretary shall establish and maintain procedures for ensuring the effective coordination of the outreach activities of the Department between and among the following:

- “(1) The Office of the Secretary.
- “(2) The Office of Public Affairs.
- “(3) The Veterans Health Administration.
- “(4) The Veterans Benefits Administration.
- “(5) The National Cemetery Administration.

“(b) ANNUAL REVIEW OF PROCEDURES.—The Secretary shall—

“(1) annually review the procedures in effect under subsection (a) for the purpose of ensuring that those procedures meet the requirements of that subsection; and

“(2) make such modifications to those procedures as the Secretary considers appropriate in light of such review in order to better achieve that purpose.

“§ 562. Outreach activities: cooperative activities with States; grants to States for improvement of outreach

“(a) PURPOSE.—It is the purpose of this section to provide for assistance by the Secretary to State and county veterans agencies to carry out programs in locations within the respective jurisdictions of such agencies that offer a high probability of improving outreach and assistance to veterans, and to the spouses, children, and parents of veterans, to ensure that such individuals are fully informed about, and assisted in applying for, any veterans’ and veterans-related benefits and programs (including State veterans’ programs) for which they may be eligible.

“(b) PRIORITY FOR AREAS WITH HIGH CONCENTRATION OF ELIGIBLE INDIVIDUALS.—In providing assistance under this section, the Secretary shall give priority to State and county veteran agencies in locations—

- “(1) that have relatively large concentrations of populations of veterans and other individuals referred to in subsection (a); or
- “(2) that are experiencing growth in the population of veterans and other individuals referred to in subsection (a).

“(c) CONTRACTS FOR OUTREACH SERVICES.—The Secretary may enter into a contract with a State or county veterans agency in order to carry out, coordinate, improve, or otherwise enhance outreach by the Department and the State or county (including outreach with respect to a State or county veterans program). As a condition of entering into any such contract, the Secretary shall require the agency to submit annually to the Secretary a three-year plan for the use of any funds provided to the agency pursuant to the contract and to meet the annual out-

come measures developed by the Secretary under subsection (d)(4).

“(d) GRANTS.—(1) The Secretary may make a grant to a State or county veterans agency to be used to carry out, coordinate, improve, or otherwise enhance—

“(A) outreach activities, including activities carried out pursuant to a contract entered into under subsection (c); and

“(B) activities to assist in the development and submittal of claims for veterans and veterans-related benefits, including activities carried out pursuant to a contract entered into under subsection (c).

“(2) A State veterans agency that receives a grant under this subsection may award all or a portion of the grant to county veterans agencies within the State to provide outreach services for veterans, on the basis of the number of veterans residing in the jurisdiction of each county.

“(3) To be eligible for a grant under this subsection, a State or county veterans agency shall submit to the Secretary an application containing such information and assurances as the Secretary may require. The Secretary shall require a State or county veterans agency to include, as part of the agency’s application—

“(A) a three-year plan for the use of the grant; and

“(B) a description of the programs through which the agency will meet the annual outcome measures developed by the Secretary under paragraph (4).

“(4)(A) The Secretary shall develop and provide to the recipient of a grant under this subsection written guidance on annual outcome measures, Department policies, and procedures for applying for grants under this section.

“(B) The Secretary shall annually review the performance of each State or county veterans agency that receives a grant under this section.

“(C) In the case of a State or county veterans agency that is a recipient of a grant under this subsection that does not meet the annual outcome measures developed by the Secretary, the Secretary shall require the agency to submit a remediation plan under which the agency shall describe how and when it plans to meet such outcome measures. The Secretary must approve such plan before the Secretary may make a subsequent grant to that agency under this subsection.

“(5) No portion of any grant awarded under this subsection may be used for the purposes of administering the grant funds or to subsidize the salaries of State or county veterans service officers or other employees of a State or county veterans agency that receives a grant under this subsection.

“(6) Federal funds provided to a State or county veterans agency under this subsection may not be used to provide more than 50 percent of the total cost of the State or county government activities described in paragraph (1) and shall be used to expand existing outreach programs and services and not to supplant State and local funding that is otherwise available.

“(7) In awarding grants under this subsection, the Secretary shall give priority to State and county veterans agencies that serve the largest populations of veterans.

“(8)(A) In a case in which a county government does not have a county veterans agency, the county government may be awarded a grant under this subsection to establish such an agency.

“(B) In a case in which a county government does not have a county veterans agency and does not seek to establish such an agency through the use of a grant under this subsection, the State veterans agency for the State in which the county is located may use a grant under this section to provide outreach services for that county.

“(C) In the case of a State in which no State or county veterans agency seeks to receive a grant under this subsection, the funds that would otherwise be allocated for that State shall be reallocated to those States in which county veterans agencies exist and have sought grants under this subsection.

“(9) A grant under this subsection may be used to provide education and training, including on-the-job training, for State, county, and local government employees who provide (or when trained will provide) veterans outreach services in order for those employees to obtain accreditation in accordance with procedures approved by the Secretary and, for employees so accredited, for purposes of continuing education.

“(e) DEFINITIONS.—For the purposes of this section:

“(1) The term ‘State veterans agency’ means the element of the government of a State that has responsibility for programs and activities of that State government relating to veterans benefits.

“(2) The term ‘county veterans agency’ means the element of the government of a county or municipality that has responsibility for programs and activities of that county or municipal government relating to veterans benefits.

“§ 563. Outreach activities: funding

“(a) SEPARATE ACCOUNT.—Amounts for the outreach activities of the Department under this subchapter shall be budgeted and appropriated through a separate appropriation account.

“(b) SEPARATE STATEMENT OF AMOUNT.—In the budget justification materials submitted to Congress in support of the Department budget for any fiscal year (as submitted with the budget of the President under section 1105(a) of title 31), the Secretary shall include a separate statement of the amount requested to be appropriated for that fiscal year for the account specified in subsection (a).

“§ 564. Definition of outreach

“For purposes of this subchapter, the term ‘outreach’ means the act or process of taking steps in a systematic manner to provide information, services, and benefits counseling to veterans, and the survivors of veterans, who may be eligible to receive benefits under the laws administered by the Secretary to ensure that those individuals are fully informed about, and assisted in applying for, any benefits and programs under such laws for which they may be eligible.

“§ 565. Authorization of appropriations

“There is authorized to be appropriated to the Secretary for each of fiscal years 2008, 2009, and 2010, \$25,000,000 to carry out this subchapter, including making grants under section 562(d) of this title.”.

(b) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of sections at the beginning of such chapter is amended by adding at the end the following new items:

“SUBCHAPTER IV—OUTREACH ACTIVITIES

“561. Outreach activities: coordination of activities within the Department.

“562. Outreach activities: cooperative activities with States; grants to States for improvement of outreach.

“563. Outreach activities: funding.

“564. Definition of outreach.

“565. Authorization of appropriations.”.

(c) DEADLINE FOR IMPLEMENTATION.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall implement the outreach activities required under subchapter IV of chapter 5 of title 38, United States Code, as added by subsection (a), by not later than 120 days after the date of the enactment of this Act.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from California (Mr. FILNER) and the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. BUYER) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California.

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, I yield to myself such time as I may consume.

This bill comes to us from the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. MCINTYRE), and we thank him for his leadership on veterans outreach.

If I had to sum up this bill in one phrase, I would say that it allows local organizations to provide more bang for the buck by having greater resources at the local level.

This bill requires the VA to partner with State and local governments, through grant opportunities, to reach out to veterans and their families to ensure receipt of benefit for which they are eligible and assist them in completing their benefits claims.

As we have seen from recent news reports all over the country, we still have veterans slipping through the cracks of this system. They are either unaware of their veterans benefits or are having difficulty getting those benefits processed.

This bill establishes a grant program for the VA to provide to States' outreach activities, cooperative relationships and benefit claims development. The grant program allows State veterans agencies to award a portion of the grants to local governments for outreach purposes.

In addition, the grant allows funding for education and training of State and local government employees for accreditation to provide outreach services. It may also be used to establish a local government veterans service program.

The bill prohibits any portion of the grant to be used by the State for administrative purposes and requires the VA to allocate grants based on veteran populations.

The bill limits grant use by States to less than 50 percent of the cost of State and local government outreach activities and prohibits grant funds from supplanting State and local funds for such activities.

H.R. 67 authorizes \$25 million annually, in fact \$1 per veteran in our Nation, to improve outreach to veterans and remove some of the significant obstacles veterans must overcome to access their benefits. This is particularly true in rural areas, which Mr. MCINTYRE represents. The bill also contains performance measures to ensure that grant recipients are properly fulfilling the requirements of the program.

The bill is supported by the American Legion, Military Officers Association, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Paralyzed Veterans of America, National County Veteran Service Officers, National Organization of Veterans Advocates, and Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. BUYER. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

I rise in strong support of H.R. 67, the Veterans Outreach Improvement Act. I thank my colleagues, Mr. MCINTYRE and Mr. FILNER, for bringing the legislation to the floor.

H.R. 67 requires Secretary Nicholson to coordinate and implement a plan throughout the VA to help provide veterans with outreach so that they are aware of potential benefits and understand how to apply for them.

The bill also authorizes a matching fund grants program for State and local governments to provide such outreach.

I'd also like to thank my colleague, Mr. LAMBORN from Colorado, for his amendment to this legislation with reporting and grant requirements to strengthen accountability for admission.

Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Colorado (Mr. LAMBORN).

Mr. LAMBORN. Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of H.R. 67, the Veterans Outreach Improvement Act of 2007.

I would like to thank my friend and colleague, Mr. HALL of New York, chairman of the committee's Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs Subcommittee, of which I am ranking member, for his leadership on this bill.

I would also like to thank Mr. MCINTYRE, the sponsor of this legislation, and both Ranking Member BUYER and Chairman FILNER for their support.

One of the persistent challenges we face in providing benefits to deserving veterans is communicating to them and their families the existence of benefits they may have earned. This bill is a solid example of good federalism. It funds outreach by State and local governments, which have proven to be capable incubators for effective public policy.

This legislation also sends VA a signal that Congress expects strong and effective outreach to our veterans.

I'm also pleased that Chairman HALL and I were able to work together to improve an already good bill with an amendment that would improve VA's accountability for the taxpayer dollars allocated under this authorization.

This amendment would require any State or county veterans agency applying for funds to submit a plan for their use to the VA Secretary and for the Secretary to review their performance annually.

I urge my colleagues to support this important legislation.

□ 1500

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, I yield to the author of the legislation, Mr. MCINTYRE, such time as he may consume.

Mr. MCINTYRE. Mr. Speaker, I am honored to rise today in strong support of H.R. 67, the Veterans Outreach Improvement Act of 2007, a bill which I filed on the first day of this 110th Congress back in January.

I want to thank Chairman FILNER and Ranking Member BUYER for their

support, as well as Mr. HALL, the chairman of the subcommittee, and the gentleman who just spoke, Mr. LAMBORN, the ranking member of the subcommittee.

This truly has been a bipartisan effort. H.R. 67 will help our veterans cut through the bureaucratic red tape. You know, as we approach Memorial Day this coming weekend, there can be no greater tribute that we pay to our veterans than ensuring that they receive the benefits that they need and deserve.

H.R. 67 would allow the VA to partner with State and local governments to reach out to veterans and their families, to ensure that they receive the benefits for which they are eligible, and assisting them in completing their benefits claims. The Veterans Outreach Improvement Act would require the Secretary of the VA to establish and annually review a plan to coordinate outreach activities within the Department so that local veterans service officers can better serve our veterans.

Unfortunately, many veterans, their spouses, or, in some cases, their surviving spouses, are unaware of the benefits to which they are entitled through the VA. In fact, according to a Knight-Ridder report, as many as 2 million poor veterans or their widows may not be receiving up to \$22 billion annually in pensions to which they are entitled. Other estimates suggest that only 30 percent of our veterans receive the benefits for which they are eligible.

Under this bill, the Secretary of the VA would establish a grant program to fund outreach at the State and local levels with accompanying performance measures to ensure that the Federal funds are effectively promoting outreach. This bill would authorize \$25 million annually in fiscal years 2008, 2009, and 2010 to fund this grant program. That is \$1 for each veteran in America, just \$1 to make sure that we are reaching out to these brave men and women who fought for our country to know about the benefits they have earned and have assistance in applying for them. It would be \$25 million well spent, well directed. It's the least that we can do for those who have put their lives on the line for our country to make sure they know, understand and, in fact, receive the benefits for which they are eligible.

By providing these vital resources to veterans service offices at the State and Federal level, we will indeed get more bang for our buck to locate veterans and assist them in receiving the benefits they deserve.

This legislation is supported by the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Paralyzed Veterans of America, Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, the Military Officers Association of America, the National Association of Veterans' Advocates and the National Association of County Veterans Service Officers.

My special thanks to Ms. Ann Knowles of Sampson County, North

Carolina, who has worked with us on this important bill in her role as national president of the County Veterans Service Officers.

As Memorial Day approaches, it's important that we demonstrate to this Nation's veterans our commitment to provide them the benefits that they need and deserve. By passing the Veterans Outreach Improvement Act, we will do just that.

Mr. BUYER. Mr. Speaker, I yield to myself such time as I may consume.

I would ask the Chair how much time I have.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The gentleman from Indiana has 18 minutes remaining.

Mr. BUYER. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the gentleman for bringing this bill to the Veterans' Affairs Committee and for his interest in outreach.

In the bill previous to this one, I brought up an issue with regard to how we give proper recognition to a Medal of Honor recipient, Jerry Murphy of New Mexico. Jerry Murphy, in his tenure at the Department of Veterans Affairs, even after he retired, was a champion of veterans outreach. Like many of my comrades, when they come back from war, they have seen a lot of things, far worse than what I have ever seen. They call themselves generally, Mr. MCINTYRE, the lucky ones, because one of their friends or buddies is in worse shape than what they are; they dedicate their lives to them.

That's exactly what Jerry Murphy did in his tenure, not only serving the Department of Veterans Affairs, but, in addition, he was the director of the Veterans Services Division of the Albuquerque, New Mexico, regional VA office from 1974 to 1997. This individual, dedicated his life and received not only the Medal of Honor, he also received the Silver Star.

What I would like to do, so America can reach out and touch and understand the type of individual who would dedicate his life to the service of his comrades, and he would push them in a wheelchair, take them to an appointment in that hospital. The individual he was pushing, they had no idea that they were being pushed by a Medal of Honor recipient.

This individual, Raymond G. Murphy, was a second lieutenant in the United States Marines Reserve, Company A, 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, 1st Marine Division, and 3 February of 1953 was an important date, because on that date, for his conspicuous gallantry, and the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty as a platoon commander of Company A, and actions against an enemy aggressor force, he rose up and distinguished himself.

The citation that he received when he was given the Congressional Medal of Honor stated that although painfully wounded by fragments of an enemy mortar shell while leading his evacuation platoon in support of assault units attacking a cleverly concealed and well-entrenched hostile

force occupying commanding ground, Second Lieutenant Murphy steadfastly refused medical aid and continued to lead his men up a hill through a withering barrage of hostile mortar and small-arms fire, skillfully maneuvering his force from one position to the next and shouting words of encouragement.

Undeterred by increasing intense enemy fire, he immediately located casualties as they fell and made several trips up and down the fire-swept hill to direct evacuation teams for the wounded, personally carrying many of the stricken marines to safety.

When reinforcements were needed by the assaulting elements, Second Lieutenant Murphy employed part of his unit as support, and, during the ensuing battle, he killed two of the enemy with his pistol.

With all the wounded evacuated and the assaulting units beginning to disengage, he remained behind with a carbine to cover the movement of the friendly forces off the hill, and, through the suffering of intense pain from his previous wounds, seized an automatic rifle to provide more firepower when the enemy reappeared in the trenches.

After reaching the base of the hill, he organized a search party again to ascend the slope for a final check on missing marines. Locating and carrying the bodies of a marine gun crew back down the hill, he was wounded a second time while conducting the entire force to the line of departure through a continuing barrage of enemy small arms, artillery, mortar fire.

He also, once again, refused medical assistance until assured that every one of his men, including all casualties, had preceded him to the main line. His resolute, inspiring leadership, exceptional fortitude and great personal valor reflect the highest credit upon Second Lieutenant Raymond Murphy, and he enhanced the finest traditions of the United States Naval Service.

This was the citation he received, was given to him when he received the Medal of Honor. This is the same individual whereby the three members of the New Mexico delegation, led by HEATHER WILSON, have brought a bill, H.R. 474, to the floor about the VA Medical Center in Albuquerque, New Mexico, where he worked. As a matter of fact, he was always the humble servant. Even after his retirement, as I said, he became a volunteer.

This brave marine, who earned the Medal of Honor, chose to be buried wearing his VA hospital volunteer smock. This is the type of individual of whom, at a moment like this, as we go into Memorial Day, we think of these individuals, not only what they have done, not only at the moment of calling, it was most difficult during war, but then how did they dedicate their life.

Memorial Day, yes, it's that day, but it's also a day whereby, not those who just died in service to country, but what do they do later on with their

life, and we think of them. Here is a gentleman, Mr. MCINTYRE, I know exactly this is the type of person you are thinking about, who dedicated themselves to outreach.

So I ask you to talk to the chairman, because he is the sole impediment as to why the House and the Senate do not honor this gentleman.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on H.R. 67, as amended.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from California?

There was no objection.

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, I urge all my colleagues to unanimously support this bill.

Mr. ENGEL. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of six excellent pieces of legislation that would benefit our Nation's veterans.

Unfortunately, due to a family medical emergency, I am unable to be present and vote for these bills today. However, had I been here to vote, each of the six bills would have had my full support.

As we approach Memorial Day, it is important to honor our Nation's servicemen and servicewomen. We would not be a free Nation without the sacrifices that each and every one has made. These six important pieces of legislation are an excellent way to repay some of the debt that we owe all of our soldiers, sailors, airmen, marines and merchant marines.

I support each of these bills, and I urge all of my colleagues to honor our veterans by supporting these bills as well.

Ms. BORDALLO. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 67, the Veterans Outreach Improvement Act of 2007. This bill directs the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to establish, maintain, and modify as necessary procedures for ensuring the effective coordination of outreach activities of the Department of Veterans Affairs, the Office of the Secretary, the Office of Public Affairs, the Veterans Health Administration, the Veterans Benefits Administration, and the National Cemetery Administration. The bill would also direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to ensure that state, territorial and local outreach assistance is provided in locations that have relatively large concentrations of veterans or are experiencing growth in veteran populations. Additionally, this bill would authorize the Secretary to make grants to state veterans agencies for state and local outreach services. This legislation is supported by the Veterans of Foreign Wars, Paralyzed Veterans of America, Military Officers Association of America, and Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America. It represents another step in our effort to fulfill our promises in the GI Bill of Rights for the 21st Century.

It is a important that we act in manner that will help ensure that our government sponsors quality programs and provides quality services to our veterans. It is also important that we act in a manner that will help ensure, to the extent possible, that our veterans are able to take full advantage of the programs and services offered by Department of Veterans Affairs facilities across the country. To achieve these

goals we must, among other things, improve the outreach capabilities and capacities of the Department of Veterans Affairs while also improving its coordination with state, territorial and local authorities. This will help greatly in our ongoing efforts to disseminate information regarding veterans programs and services and also help improve the quality of claims for benefits submitted by our veterans.

I remain committed to facilitating communication between federal authorities, veteran service organizations, and veterans on Guam. We have achieved some success in this regard. But more must be done. I am routinely informed by federal officials that the quality of claims received from Guam veterans, in particular, needs to be improved. Efforts to improve and enhance outreach, communication, and information sharing between federal and local officials and veterans embodied in this bill will help the situation on Guam. But I also want to take this opportunity to again urge the veterans service organizations and veterans themselves to be vigorous and proactive in seeking out information and training on veterans programs and benefit claims submissions. Many veterans already are, and in many ways, we are witnesses to veterans helping veterans. Continued information sharing and collaboration among and within the greater veterans community across the country will continue to result in stronger programs and services for them.

This legislation is timely and important. On Guam, indeed across the country, our population of veterans grows each month. We have a moral obligation to serve, in the best way possible, those who have served to protect us and to defend our freedom and liberty. Support for this legislation is one way to help fulfill that obligation. I urge my colleagues to join me in supporting H.R. 67.

Mr. REICHERT. Mr. Speaker, as a former member of the Air Force Reserve, I am pleased to rise in support of this important veterans outreach measure. We must continue to ensure that all of our veterans are aware of and receive the benefits that they have earned and deserve. These grants will help our states connect veterans with the many benefits for which they are eligible but may be unaware are available to them.

But it is not just our states' responsibility to conduct this outreach, and I encourage all of my colleagues in the House to use the privilege of our offices to help veterans obtain needed benefits and services. In March, I held a Veterans' Resource Fair in my district. I brought 45 service providers together under one roof to help more than 350 veterans register for benefits, find jobs, and resolve pressing case work issues. I will hold another in just a few months time. My office stands ready to assist any one of you in conducting a similar event for the veterans in your district.

We must work to support the men and women who made individual sacrifices to preserve our freedom not just on Memorial Day, but on all days. I urge my colleagues to pass this bill, and I hope that we will continue to join together to promote and protect meaningful benefits for our veterans. I yield back.

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from California (Mr. FILNER) that the House suspend the

rules and pass the bill, H.R. 67, as amended.

The question was taken.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. In the opinion of the Chair, two-thirds being in the affirmative, the ayes have it.

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, on that I demand the yeas and nays.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX and the Chair's prior announcement, further proceedings on this question will be postponed.

ESTABLISHMENT OF NATIONAL CEMETERY IN SOUTHERN COLORADO REGION

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 1660) to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to establish a national cemetery for veterans in the southern Colorado region, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 1660

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. ESTABLISHMENT OF NATIONAL CEMETERY IN SOUTHERN COLORADO REGION.

(a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall establish, in accordance with chapter 24 of title 38, United States Code, a national cemetery in El Paso County, Colorado, to serve the needs of veterans and their families in the southern Colorado region.

(b) CONSULTATION IN SELECTION OF SITE.—Before selecting the site for the national cemetery established under subsection (a), the Secretary shall consult with—

(1) appropriate officials of the State of Colorado and local officials in the southern Colorado region; and

(2) appropriate officials of the United States, including the Administrator of General Services, with respect to land belonging to the United States in El Paso County, Colorado, that would be suitable to establish the national cemetery under subsection (a).

(c) AUTHORITY TO ACCEPT DONATION OF PARCEL OF LAND.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs may accept on behalf of the United States the gift of an appropriate parcel of real property. The Secretary shall have administrative jurisdiction over such parcel of real property, and shall use such parcel to establish the national cemetery under subsection (a).

(2) INCOME TAX TREATMENT OF GIFT.—For purposes of Federal income, estate, and gift taxes, the real property accepted under paragraph (1) shall be considered as a gift to the United States.

(d) REPORT.—As soon as practicable after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary shall submit to Congress a report on the establishment of the national cemetery under subsection (a). The report shall set forth a schedule for such establishment and an estimate of the costs associated with such establishment.

(e) RELATIONSHIP TO CONSTRUCTION AND FIVE YEAR CAPITAL PLAN.—The requirement to establish a national cemetery under subsection (a) shall be added to the current list of priority projects, but should not take priority over existing projects listed on the National Cemetery Administration's construc-

tion and five-year capital plan for fiscal year 2008.

(f) SOUTHERN COLORADO REGION DEFINED.—In this Act, the term "southern Colorado region" means the geographic region consisting of the following Colorado counties:

- (1) El Paso.
- (2) Pueblo.
- (3) Teller.
- (4) Fremont.
- (5) Las Animas.
- (6) Huerfano.
- (7) Custer.
- (8) Costilla.
- (9) Alamosa.
- (10) Saguache.
- (11) Conejos.
- (12) Mineral.
- (13) Archuleta.
- (14) Hinsdale.
- (15) Gunnison.
- (16) Pitkin.
- (17) La Plata.
- (18) Montezuma.
- (19) San Juan.
- (20) Ouray.
- (21) San Miguel.
- (22) Dolores.
- (23) Montrose.
- (24) Delta.
- (25) Mesa.
- (26) Crowley.
- (27) Kiowa.
- (28) Bent.
- (29) Baca.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from California (Mr. FILNER) and the gentleman from Colorado (Mr. LAMBORN) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California.

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

I am pleased to bring to the floor a bipartisan bill authored by Congressman SALAZAR of Colorado with Congressman LAMBORN of Colorado. It establishes a veterans cemetery in El Paso County, Colorado.

Southern Colorado, which includes El Paso, Colorado, and the city of Colorado Springs, has the second highest concentration of veterans living in the United States. Currently those veterans and their families who wish either to visit a veterans cemetery or have their loved ones interred must travel into the Denver metropolitan area to Fort Logan National Cemetery.

Not only is this an undue burden, but the Fort Logan cemetery is running out of room. To alleviate this problem, H.R. 1660 directs the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to establish a national cemetery for veterans in El Paso County, Colorado. This was a fitting tribute to those Americans who have served our Nation with honor. The veterans national cemeteries of the United States demonstrate the desire of a grateful Nation to appropriately commemorate those who have served in the Armed Forces.

Since 1862, close to 3 million burials have been made in the VA national cemeteries. The National Cemetery Administration of the Department of Veterans Affairs manages 125 of these cemeteries nationwide for our veterans. Of these, 58 of them are no longer accepting interments. Thus, the